WATERSHED workbook
Hello! We are so excited you are here!

We put together this workbook especially for Watershed. Inside you’ll find an exhibition introduction, an object checklist, primary questions, curricular connections, and context. This workbook is meant as an introductory text to help you understand the purpose and background of this exhibit, giving you a starting point as you explore and learn about it in person. Mark it up, use post-it notes, bring it with you into the gallery, whatever helps you explore and wonder!

Credits
UMMA Team: Isabel Engel, Jennifer Friess and Grace Vandervliet
Special Thanks to: Margaret Noodin and Michael Zimmerman, Jr. for translating the gallery texts into Anishinaabemowin
Before you go into the gallery...

What do you already know about the Great Lakes & the watershed?
WATERSHED

The Great Lakes watershed— the world’s largest concentration of fresh water—spans two countries and eight states and has been the ancestral land of the Anishinaabe peoples since well before these borders were drawn. The term “watershed” refers to the geographical network of the Great Lakes basin—the five lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior) and the rivers, streams, and reservoirs that feed into them. But it also signals a crucial turning point. Our region faces a host of crises brought on by the misuse of resources and by cultural, economic, and environmental discrimination, even as communities in the region mobilize to assert their rights, reclaim their histories, and protect their waterways from further degradation.

Watershed features fifteen contemporary artists who explore issues central to the Great Lakes region and its future, including several invited by UMMA to create new artwork for the exhibition. Some give voice to the experiences of those who are marginalized, particularly in Black and Indigenous communities, making personal and visceral the relationships among power, resources, and people. Many sound an alarm about the pervasive and lasting effects of corporate self-interest and extractive pollution, sometimes using the water and pollutants as materials in their art practice. Others reflect on water as a repository of memories and communal and personal histories, especially those tied to settler colonization of the watershed. All demonstrate how art can contribute to and shape current dialogues on the critical problems confronting our region.

In recognition of the Anishinaabeg—the original inhabitants of the Great Lakes watershed—the interpretation for this exhibition is presented in both Anishinaabemowin and English.

Jennifer M. Friess
Associate Curator of Photography

Location: UMMA
Gallery: Taubman I Gallery
Floor: Second Floor
What major themes do you notice by just looking around at the objects? (Hint: objects are likely grouped by themes)
In *Flint Water Project*, Pope.L recasts the people of Flint as agents rather than victims, as they are usually depicted in the press. He originally staged this installation as an event-performance at What Pipeline gallery in Detroit in 2017. He wanted to give the people of Detroit, a fellow midwestern city with a history of water inequality, an opportunity to act as benefactors to Flint, thus linking them as neighbors and collaborators. He set up a store selling bottles of water contaminated with lead and E. Coli from the home of Flint resident Tiantha Williams. Proceeds of the sales were donated to the United Way of Genesee County and Hydrate Detroit. On view here is a boutique version of the original store. By raising consciousness and funds for an important cause, Pope.L’s Flint Water draws attention to the potential of art as a force for social change.

Bottles of Flint water from Pope.L’s *Flint Water Project* are for sale in the UMMA shop. Proceeds go to the United Way of Genesee County.

How is Pope.L acting as an activist here?
LaToya Ruby Frazier is an artist and activist committed to using her camera as an agent of social change. *Shea brushing Zion’s teeth* is from the first of three acts in her Flint is Family photo essay series, which focuses on the Cobb family from Flint, Michigan. The first act introduces the Cobbs—Shea, her daughter Zion, and her mother Renée—as they endure the consequences of the city’s devastating water crisis. The crisis began in 2014, when the city decided to save money by changing its water supply to the Flint River; inadequate water treatment and outdated pipes contaminated much of the city’s potable water with lead, which the government long denied.

Frazier lived in Flint with the Cobbs for months, documenting the challenges the family faced without access to running water. *Shea brushing Zion’s teeth* poignantly features the day-to-day consequences of the ecological disaster in Flint—making personal the broader human toll of clean water crises. While pipe replacements are planned to be completed in 2022 and financial settlements of lawsuits began in January of 2022, activists say further support for long-term illnesses caused by the contaminated water is needed.

*Think for a moment, how many different ways do you use water just in your home?*
Matthew Brandt merges the physical materials of a landscape with the methods he uses to represent it. In *Bridges Over Flint*, he employs the same water that has poisoned residents of Flint, Michigan, to process his photographs. To enhance their toxic appearance, he toned them with bleach and red wine. By making the contaminated water integral to the photograph, Brandt creates a physical testament to the danger Flint residents continue to face from hazardous pollutants that are otherwise invisible to the eye.

“...I toned the prints with red wine and applied bleach over some areas,” he told Shutterbug. Together with the lead and other toxins inherent in Flint’s water, this caused unexpected effects in the printed image. The work is a reminder of the dangers, invisible to the naked eye, faced by the people of Flint during the water crisis.

What other ways could you use the Flint water to create an artistic expression of environmental activism? Be creative!
Kate Levy
United States, born 1984

The Roar on the Other Side of Silence (Along Line 5)
2022
Multi-media installation
Courtesy of the artist
Commissioned by the University of Michigan Museum of Art for Watershed

Kate Levy’s documentary films and installations interrogate the relationships between unequal access to resources, economic and environmental racism, media narratives, and democratic agency in Michigan and beyond. The Roar on the Other Side of Silence (Along Line 5) brings together years of place-based research on the subject of Enbridge’s aging Line 5, a segment of the energy company’s vast network of underground pipelines that transports millions of gallons of crude oil per day from Wisconsin through the Straits of Mackinac (which connect Lake Michigan and Lake Huron) to Ontario, Canada.

Levy’s installation features two parallel timelines, separated by a red line. The top segment documents elements of life above ground, including instances of spills. It includes a stream of photographs Levy made during drives along the pipeline’s route—unplanned and intuition-driven journeys through capitalist landscapes. The bottom segment features a timeline of Line 5’s political history, including the stories of decision making processes often inaccessible to the broader public, and seminal events that passed largely unnoticed. Together they illustrate the power dynamics between extractive industries and local communities, and the relationship between everyday life and impending catastrophe.

In a way, Kate Levy’s work is a study of the impact of Line 5 in her community. What are some takeaways from Kate’s work?
Cai Guo-Qiang
China, born 1957
Cuyahoga River Lightning: Drawing for the Cleveland Museum of Art
2018
Gunpowder on canvas
Collection of the artist

Cai Guo-Qiang’s *Cuyahoga River Lightning* is a reminder that water is a life force that can be sickened or destroyed. This work was commissioned by the Cleveland Museum of Art for an environmental disaster that took place over fifty years ago: in 1969, a section of the infamous Cuyahoga River that runs through Cleveland caught fire following more than a century of pollution from the oil, steel, and sewage industries. Though fires on the river were common, the ’69 fire became a flashpoint for the burgeoning environmental movement in the United States.

In this work, Cai traced the river’s path using gunpowder, which he then ignited. The burnt residue is visible on the canvas (the adjacent video shows the creation process of the gunpowder painting). The combustion created a spectacle of destruction while also conveying the transformative power of change.

Gunpowder was invented by the Chinese, who call it huoyao, meaning “fire medicine” and the river’s undulating path evokes qi, meaning “vital energy,” in Chinese medicine.

Does this seem backwards or confusing? Don’t we usually use water to *PUT OUT* a fire? Discuss how other objects (household chemicals, industrial waste) can find their way into bodies of water and how that affects chemistry.
Find an object in this exhibit we haven’t discussed yet, and do your own thinking and questioning below:

**SEE:**
Describe (or draw!) everything you see.

**THINK:**
What do you think this work is trying to communicate?

**CONNECT:**
What connections to your studies or world do you find?
IMAGINE you are able to create your own exhibit around health disparities. Use this page to brainstorm how it would look.

Think of something that matters to YOU

What would be your major themes?

Who would your exhibition be for? Which communities are you centering?

What stories do you want to tell?

Name your exhibition

Would you include any of the objects in this show? Which ones?
Go Deeper:

Learn more about the issues facing the Great Lakes and its watershed region by visiting these organizations:

**Huron River Watershed Council:** [https://www.hrwc.org/](https://www.hrwc.org/)

**U-M G.L.A.C.E.:** [https://lsa.umich.edu/umbs/students/courses/glac-great-lakes-arts-cultures-and-environments.html](https://lsa.umich.edu/umbs/students/courses/glac-great-lakes-arts-cultures-and-environments.html)

**Detroit River Story Lab:** [https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/detroit-river-story-lab/](https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/detroit-river-story-lab/)

**Settler Colonial City Project:** [https://settlercolonialcityproject.org/](https://settlercolonialcityproject.org/)

**We The People of Detroit:** [https://www.wethepeopleofdetroit.com/](https://www.wethepeopleofdetroit.com/)

**Ojibwe.net - Inawe Mazina’igan Map Project:** [https://ojibwe.net/inawe-mazinaigan-map-project/](https://ojibwe.net/inawe-mazinaigan-map-project/)

Learn

Pick an organization to learn about. What does this organization do?